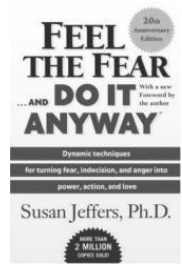


“Fright or Flight” – (part 2)
Exodus 3: 1-12 (CEV)

A man was seen fleeing down the hall of the hospital just before his operation. A security guard stopped him before he could leave the hospital and asked, “What’s the matter?” The man said, “I heard the nurse say, ‘It’s a very simple operation, don’t worry, I’m sure it will be all right.’” “She was just trying to comfort you,” said the security guard. “What’s so frightening about that?” “She wasn’t talking to me,” exclaimed the man. “She was talking to the surgeon!”

Last week we began talking about fear. We talked about how everyone has fear of some kind and how that fear can affect our work and our relationships. Our fears keep us from being the person we were created to be. We can be a prisoner to fear and allow the fear to constrict and control us. But we were created to grow and to live.

I’ve been reading a great book called *Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway* by Susan Jeffers.



It is not a new book. It’s been out for quite a while but it’s a classic that is as true today as it was when it was written twenty years ago. The title of the book sums it up. Her message is basically ‘*Don’t wait for your feelings of fear to disappear before you do something outside your comfort zone. You need to move towards the fear, and then your fear will be pushed back and the area in which you feel comfortable will be much bigger.*’ Moving towards your fear also frees you from being controlled by your fears, so that you are truly free from fear. That doesn’t mean you won’t feel the fear, but it won’t stop you.

This week I want to ask, ‘Why bother?’. If you are happy in your own little box, in your own little comfort zone, and if your fears are not bothering you, then why worry and why change? Why do something that will cause some discomfort when you’re ‘Perfectly fine the way you are, thank you very much!?’ The answer is you were created for something special and for something more.

I love the story of Moses that was read earlier, when God spoke to Moses through a burning bush. Moses was not a young man anymore. (Granted he apparently lived until the age of 120, so he did have some life left in him!) But taking on the ruler of Egypt was probably not on his bucket list of things he hoped to do before he kicked his bucket.

Moses has an interesting life and story. From the beginning you have a sense that he was born and saved for a reason. You probably remember that the Israelites were getting too numerous in Egypt, and Pharaoh and the Egyptians were getting nervous. At the time Moses was born, a command was given that all Jewish male babies be killed. Moses’ mother hid her son for three months and then she had the idea of putting him in a basket in the Nile in the hopes that the Pharaoh’s daughter would find him and take pity. That’s exactly what happened. This Egyptian princess couldn’t resist the helpless, crying three-month-old. She saved him from the water and from her father and, in the process, ended up saving the nation of Israel. My hunch is that that purpose burned within him throughout his life, even if he didn’t understand it until much later.

Moses grows up in privilege and prosperity, but he is clearly aware that he is not an Egyptian but an Israelite. We can tell by a life changing incident that is described in four short verses in Exodus chapter 2. “One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, *one of his own people*. Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.” (Ex 2:11-12 italics added) The next day Moses intervenes again. This time he tries to break up a fight between two Hebrews. Instead of being grateful for his leadership and intervention, it becomes clear that they don’t trust Moses at all. The Hebrews see Moses as an Egyptian and not as a fellow Hebrew. They are afraid and probably jealous of his position and status and one says to him “Who made you a prince and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” This is of course tremendously ironic because the answer to the question ‘Who made you a prince and judge over us?’ is God. God did. Prince and judge is exactly what Moses became and was born to be.

You too were born for a purpose and for a reason. You are also alive for a purpose and for a reason. And for some of you, it’s against all odds that you are still here today. Believe me, it’s no accident. But perhaps you haven’t quite figured out what it is you’re called to do. When you begin to catch a glimpse of it, don’t listen to the negative,

fearful people around you, even if they are your own family. It's a strange thing, but sometimes the very people who least want us to grow into the person we were created to be are the ones closest to us. I don't claim to understand this phenomenon, but I know it is true and quite common. If you listen to the sometimes self-serving advice of your family, the results can be devastating. It is so hard, because normally we *should* listen to the advice of family and very close friends, because they are usually the only ones who are not afraid to say it like it is. Yet sometimes, when you have a hope in your heart and you think it is from God, you need to ignore fearful, negative advice and walk on.

Those words from Moses' own kin, his own family, cause Moses not just to question his true identity, but to totally throw it away. You can imagine the negative and insecure thoughts that probably started going around and around in his mind. He was probably saying to himself: "Yeah, what *was* I thinking?! I'm no leader. I don't even belong. I don't belong to the Egyptians and I don't belong with the Hebrews."

This past week Hugh Gardiner was our guest blogger and he wrote a great blog called "*What do you store up in your heart?*"

(You can check out our blog at www.wallnotes.blogspot.com or go to our church website www.wallstreetchurch.com and follow the links).

Hugh wrote: "There are times when I catch my thoughts stuck in a loop. I find myself rehearsing the reasons why my complaints are justified, how hard done by I am, and why the other person is wrong and I'm right." But, he goes on to say "I don't want to be imprisoned by this kind of negative thinking. This is the kind of bondage that I think of when I hear Jesus' words about having come to set the captive free." It's so true, isn't it? We do become captive to our own negative thinking and to our fears and feelings of insecurity.

That's exactly what happened to Moses. Moses got stuck in his fears and so fled to the wilderness. In the meantime he gets married, has some kids, and spends his time looking after his father-in-law's sheep. My hunch is he was okay, but deep down not truly happy or satisfied. That's the annoying thing about a call. You can run, but you can't hide. He's haunted by his past and wants to get away from it, but he is hard-wired to lead people from bondage to freedom. I'm guessing that no matter how hard he tried to convince himself that it was a pretty good life and that he really shouldn't complain, I'm guessing that leading sheep just wasn't cutting it.

Then we come to that wonderful encounter with God in the burning bush. God identifies himself and says he's seen the oppression of his people, and then God says: "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." (Ex 3:10) Moses' answer goes right back to the belief he held in his heart after the accusation of his fellow Hebrews so many years ago. "But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?'" (Ex 3:11) How does God answer that question? He answers it by telling Moses that he, God, will be with him. Over and over Moses says, "but...but... they'll never follow me, but I'm not a good speaker, but Pharaoh will never listen to me". Moses keeps trying to convince God that he's got the wrong guy, that he's just a shepherd and no more. The interesting thing is that God doesn't respond by trying to convince Moses that Moses really is great, instead God points to himself. When Moses says "But who am I that I should go?" God turns it around and essentially says, 'Stop looking at yourself and look at me.' The answer to Moses' and our question of 'but who am I?' is: "*It's not who you are that counts, it's who I am*".

God says: "I'll be there with you". God says "I Am". Exegesis –dissecting the meaning of the Biblical text in its original language—is not my strength. But God's answer when Moses asks him what his name is, is fascinating and a great mystery. It is commonly translated "I AM WHO I AM". But it could be translated "I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE". He uses the verb "to be" as his name. In other words, God's name is a verb. God is being. God is "am"ing. The book of Revelation says: "I am the Alpha and the Omega", says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Rev. 1:8) That's what I believe God was saying to Moses. Clearly who God is, **is** beyond the abilities of language to comprehend, but the closest thing we can say is that **God is**. God is creator and life not as a noun or an object but *living, moving, breathing, action, past, present and future, almighty, mothering, and full of power and love*. Instead of looking down at ourselves and at our weakness and fears and limitations, we are to look up at God. God is the one who created you. You were born for a special purpose, and even your parents or your children may not understand what that special purpose is, but God knows. Look up to God and you will fly. Choose *flight over fright*.

When bad things happen in life or when you are put down, you can start to believe the lie that you are no good, not smart, that you could never do this or that or be something. There's that old story you've probably heard before in one form or another. One version goes like this:

One day a neighbour came to visit his friend the chicken farmer. He was surprised to see an eagle strutting around the chicken coop, pecking at the ground, and acting like a chicken. The farmer explained to him that he had brought the bird to the coop as an abandoned chick, and only later discovered that it was an eagle. He further told his friend that since the bird had been raised a chicken that the bird actually believed himself to be a chicken.

The neighbour knew there was more to this noble bird than his behaviour showed as a chicken. He was born an eagle and had the heart of an eagle, and nothing could change that. The neighbour reached down and lifted the eagle onto the fence surrounding the chicken coop and said, “Eagle, you are an eagle. Stretch your wings and fly.” The eagle only look blankly at the man and clucked. He jumped off the fence and continued doing what chickens do. The farmer was satisfied. “I told you - he thinks he’s a chicken,” he said.

The neighbour couldn’t sleep that night and returned the next day to convince the farmer that the eagle was born for something greater. The man took the eagle from the dirty coop and carried him to the top of the farmhouse. Setting the bird down on the roof, the neighbour spoke to him: “Eagle, you are an eagle. You therefore belong to the sky and not to the earth. Stretch your wings and fly.” The large bird blinked at the man, clucked, and then jumped down into the chicken coop.

After another restless night, the friend returned the next morning to the chicken farm and took the eagle and the farmer away from the chicken coop to the foot of a high mountain. They could not see the farm nor the chicken coop from this great height. The man lifted the eagle on his outstretched arm and pointed high into the sky where the bright sun was beckoning above. He spoke: “Eagle, you are an eagle! You therefore belong to the sky and not to the earth. Stretch your wings and fly.” This time the eagle stared skyward into the bright sun, straightened his large body, and stretched his massive wings. His wings moved, slowly at first, then surely and powerfully.

With the mighty screech of an eagle, he flew away.

When you discover your life’s purpose and have the courage to live it, it will feel so right. But it’s never just about you. Imagine what might have happened if Moses had said “No thanks. I just can’t”. Imagine what might happen if you say “No thanks. I just can’t”. Of course we can’t imagine because we don’t know. Even when you live the life you were created for and are called to live, you still don’t know the impact you will have.

A woman called me in distress a little while ago. At the end of the call I asked her “Why did you call us?” She said, “When I was a teenager my parents split up one night and it was ugly and I left the house. I spent a night on the street in the rain. In the morning I walked by a United Church and I knocked on the door of the house next door where the minister lived. The minister and his wife took me in, gave me breakfast and dry clothes. They washed my clothes and then after lengthy conversations and prayer they drove me home. I’ll never forget what that United Church minister did for me, so I knew I had to call the United Church.” I don’t know if that United Church minister and his wife are still alive. She didn’t remember their names, and I wonder if they would even remember that day. I wish I could call them and tell them that their simple act of grace and kindness was never forgotten – they made a difference.

You were meant to fly. You were born to fly. And when you do, others will look up and have hope—others will catch a glimpse of the One who is calling them to spread their wings and fly too. *Come and I will send you.*

Thanks be to God. Amen.